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A Guide for
Homeowners
and Renters

IS THERE LEAD IN MY TAP WATER

... and what can I do?

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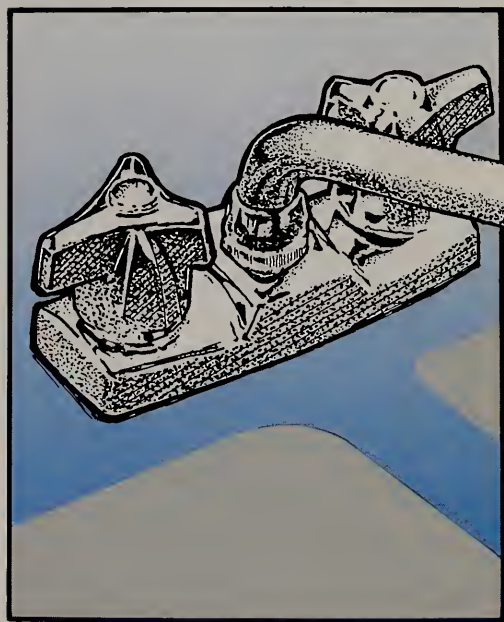
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Massachusetts
Department of Environmental
Quality Engineering

You probably know that lead can be a threat to your health. How much of a threat depends on how much lead gets into your body and how much your body retains.

Sources of lead in the environment include old paint, contaminated soil, leaded gasoline



and, to a lesser yet significant degree, drinking water.

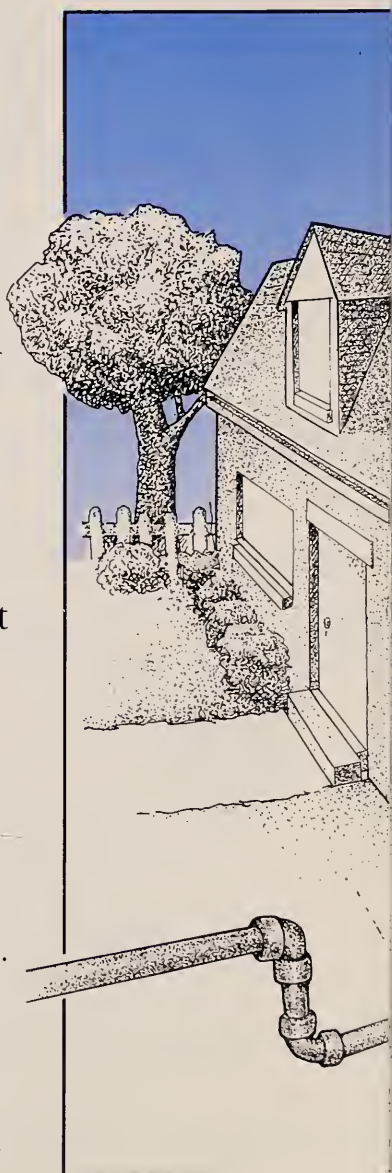
Knowing how lead gets into your tap water — and what

you can do to avoid it — will minimize your risk. This pamphlet will help you do just that.

Harmful levels of lead in drinking water are almost never found at the water source. Whether you drink water that comes from a reservoir, lake, river, or well, the amount of naturally occurring lead seldom poses a problem. But in between the source of your water and your faucet is a series of pipes and connections, including the plumbing in your home.

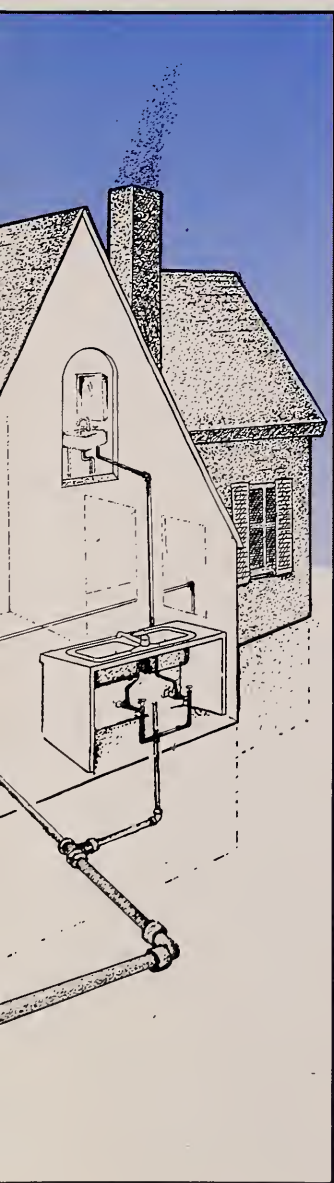
In some communities, older public water systems still contain some lead service connections (the pipe from the street to your building). Homes built before 1940 may have lead pipes. Also, lead solder was used to join pipes — until it was banned in Massachusetts in 1986.

Soft water and acidic water are especially corrosive. The more corrosive the water, the more lead it can dissolve as it passes through the pipes.



Check with your local water officials to see whether the service connection to your building contains lead. At the

same time, ask whether your water supply is treated to reduce corrosivity. The age of your home will tell you a lot. Lead pipes in service connections and in plumbing were last used in the 1930s. So if your home is more than 50 years old, there's a good chance there are lead pipes within the building. If you aren't sure, have a plumber inspect it.



If your domestic plumbing is joined with lead solder and was installed between 1981 and 1986 (again, lead solder was banned in 1986), water that stands unused in your plumbing for as few as six hours may contain excessive lead.

But some good news is that after about five years lead from solder no longer poses a risk of contamination. In the now common copper pipes, not only is most lead solder dissolved out within about five

years, but also a coating of lime builds up inside the pipe and seals in some of the lead in these joints; the older the plumbing, the lower the prob-

THINGS YOU CAN DO

●
In the morning, let water run at the faucet where you would take your first drink, until you feel the water turn as cold as it will get.

This allows you to draw water directly from the street and flushes the water that has been standing in the plumbing.

●
If no one is home and using water during the day, the water needs to be run cold again before using.

●
Always use cold tap water for cooking, drinking and preparing baby formula or foods.

ability of excessive lead from solder. So, as a general rule, original plumbing more than five and less than 50 years old poses a lower risk.

If you have high-risk plumbing, whether or not you have had your water tested for lead, you can make a few simple changes in your habits at home to reduce lead-related risk to your health. Regular flushing of the plumbing in your home is the first protection you can give yourself.

Your best defense is to know about the pipes leading into your house and the plumbing that runs to your faucets — and then, if necessary, routinely flush out water that may contain lead. Yours and your family's health is at stake. And you can do something about it.

Beware of commercially available devices for the home whose manufacturers claim they purify water. None of the following are effective against lead.

- Carbon filters, sand filters, cartridge filters. While these products do filter out certain contaminants, they do not remove lead nor reduce corrosivity.
- Water softeners, iron removal systems, ion exchange units. Soft water usually increases corrosion.
- Reverse osmosis. This treatment also softens water and therefore increases corrosion.

Lead can damage the central nervous system, the cardiovascular system, and the kidneys. Infants and young children are especially vulnerable. At low levels of absorption, lead can produce subtle changes in blood chemistry. If a child is exposed to high levels over a long period of time, it could result in mental retardation or death.



For information on how to protect against other sources of lead, contact the Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, toll-free at 1-800-532-9571.

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